

## Record visits for park

*By Cory Hatch, Jackson Hole, Wyo.  
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With two months left to go in 2009, Yellowstone National Park has broken its all-time annual visitation record with more than 3.26 million visitors.

The previous record was 3.15 million, for all 12 months of 2007. This year has already topped that by more than 116,000, or about 3.5 percent.

In September, park officials announced they needed only about 7,500 more visitors for the year to break the annual record.

October provided that, even though visitation for the month dropped significantly from October 2008. Park officials recorded a 14.9 percent drop in visitation compared with the same month last year, from about 145,000 visitors in 2008 to about 123,000.

Yellowstone spokesman Al Nash said the decline could likely be attributed to a series of storms that brought cold and snow to the region.

"Shoulder [season] visitation is driven a lot by people in the immediate region," he said. "If the weather is good, they come; if the weather is not good, they stay home. We had great weather in September and strong numbers. The October weather wasn't as nice and the visitation numbers reflect that."

Many park roads are now closed for the season and will reopen for winter snow coach and snowmobile traffic Dec. 15. Nash said those remaining weeks in 2009 aren't expected to have a significant impact on the year's overall visitation numbers.

"We'll only have a couple of weeks of winter season," he said. "The numbers are not going to change a lot."

Nash said the record-breaking year is particularly unusual given the poor economy.

"This has been a very atypical year at a time when there's been a great deal of interest in how the economic situation might impact overall visitation," he said.

Almost 490,000 people visited the park in September, compared with about 437,000 during the same month last year, marking the third record month this summer. The previous record for the month of September was set in 1995, with 468,060 visitors. August was the only summer month in which the park didn't break the previous visitation record this year.